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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving writing in the primary grades through the use of guided mini-lessons, conferencing, and portfolios. The target population consists of first and second grade students in a growing, low to middle class community. The problems of poor writing skills were documented through teacher observations and student writing samples. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a lack of skills related to inventive spelling, handwriting, and sentence structure. Faculty reported student inabilities in the overall area of writing. Review of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a non-existent writing curriculum in the primary grades. A review of solution strategies, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: guided mini-lessons, portfolios, and conferencing for grades one and two. Post-intervention data indicated an increase in the quality and quantity of the students' writing. Attitudes toward writing also changed through the course of the intervention, both in positive and negative ways. Seven appendixes contain: parent letter and consent form; writing rubric; first and second grade writing checklists; writing interest survey; 6 week assessment; and teacher generated writing prompts. (Contains 33 references, 4 tables, and 41 figures.) (Author/PM)

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IMPROVING STUDENT WRITING SKILLS IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development

Field-Based Masters Program

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving writing in the primary grades through the use of guided mini-lessons, conferencing, and portfolios. The targeted population consists of first and second grade students in a growing, low to middle class community, located in the Midwest. The problems of poor writing skills were documented through teacher observation and student writing samples.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a lack of skills related to inventive spelling, handwriting, and sentence structure. Faculty reported student inabilities in the overall area of writing. Review of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a non-existent writing curriculum in the primary grades.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: guided mini-lessons, portfolios, and conferencing for grades one and two.

Post-intervention data indicated an increase in the quality and quantity of the students' writing. Attitudes towards writing also changed through the course of the intervention, both in positive and negative ways.

SIGNATURE PAGE

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted elementary school exhibit difficulties writing at the first and second grade level. Evidence of the existence of the problem includes inability to move from invented to standard spelling, poor handwriting skills, incomplete sentences, and overall failing scores on standardized tests.

Immediate Problem Context

Site

The targeted elementary school is located in a large suburb of a major midwestern city. The grade levels are preK-6 with an average of 26.5 students per class and a total population of 427 students. The average class size is as follows: kindergarten 25.0, first grade 21.3, third grade 29.5, and sixth grade 30.0. The average pupil-teacher ratio is 18.2:1, pupil-certified staff 13.0:1, and pupil-administrator 208.0:1. The school population is 55.8% Hispanic, 42.6% Caucasian, and 1.6% Asian. The average daily attendance rate is 95.2%. The mobility rate is 33.6% with a .08% chronic truancy rate. The number of chronic truants per year is 3. The percentage of families that are designated low-income is 38.4%, and 24.7% are limited English proficient (LEP). The

faculty consists of 23 classroom teachers. There are seven teaching assistants, four English as a second language teachers (ESL), 1.5 diagnostic resource consultants (DRC), 1.5 reading teachers, 1.5 speech therapists, and one specialist for each of the following: Title I reading, gifted, art, music, band, physical education, library, computers, social worker, and nurse (half day). The majority of the teachers and administrators in the district are Caucasian, with the average teaching experience being 9.4 years. The number of teachers and staff holding a bachelor's degree is 59.9%, with 40.1% holding a master's degree. The average teacher's salary per year is $39,087, while the average administrator's salary is $79,277 (School Report Card, 2000).

The classrooms tend to have many similarities across the grade levels. Most of the classrooms have multiple windows, tile floors, no sinks or bathrooms, and two chalkboards. Each classroom has an average of one to three computers with internet access, and all teachers have assembled a classroom library. Most of the student desks in the primary grades are arranged in tables, and the intermediate grades tend to arrange the students in rows. The academic weekly time apportionment was established by the district and gives the following average minutes for the different subject areas: 300 math, 450 language arts, 150 social studies, 150 science, and 100 health. Time is also allotted for 60 minutes of physical education, 45 minutes of art, 60 minutes of music, 30 minutes media instruction, and 45 minutes of computers per week.

District

The school district has six K-6 elementary schools and one recently built middle school. The district built the middle school to ease overcrowding, but the projected enrollment still indicates future growth. The district is now looking for new ways to

prepare for the increase in student population. Currently, the boundaries are drawn so that each child will go to the school closest to his or her house. Due to the recent increase in enrollment of children of Hispanic descent, the district was given a grant to further develop its bilingual programs.

The Surrounding Community

The socioeconomic status of the surrounding community is lower-middle class. It is a residential community that is multicultural. Many of the previous homeowners were retired Bohemians, Poles, Czechs, Italians, and Norwegians. The new home buyers tend to be young families of Hispanic heritage. The median age in the community is 40 years old. The district has had an increase in student population due to growth in housing and movement of established residents. The median family income in the community was $59,356, with a population of 42,588 in 1999. The median property value averages $123,700, with most homes being bungalows built before 1939. The religious affiliations of the community include Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and Presbyterian (Local Newspaper).

National Context of the Problem

The problem of low reading abilities among children today is reflected in the newspapers, on television, and is stated through standardized test scores annually. Duffy and Hoffman (1999) state that "even the most casual observer is aware that the reading profession is under a very public and very political assault" (p.10). The problem is often contributed to too much phonics instruction, too little phonics instruction, poor teacher preparation, and the idea that teachers do not teach in the right way. Whatever the causes may be, studies have found that "students in the U.S. are failing to learn to read on a scale

unparalleled in our history" (Duffy and Hoffman,1999, p.10). While the problem of poor reading skills is highly advertised in today's world, the problem of poor writing skills is often overlooked. It is evident that poor readers are unsuccessful at writing strategies such as inventive spelling, sentence building, sight word identification, and topic comprehension.

Reading and writing are connected to each other in many ways. Studies have shown that good writers tend to be good readers, and struggling writers tend to be struggling readers (Johns & Lenski, 1994). For a child to be a successful reader, they need to use background knowledge and information from the text to create meaning about what they are reading. To be a successful writer, they need to use background knowledge about written text to create their own meaning that can be understood by those who read their text. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1990), approximately 60% of children can construct literal comprehension, but fewer than 10 percent of students in all grades, including grade 12, tested proficiently when asked to examine meaning. If children have trouble identifying meaning in a text, they will understandably have an even harder time constructing it on their own as writers.

It is proof alone that some students are at-risk learners because many programs, such as Early Intervention in Reading, Success for All, Accelerated Literacy Learning, and Reading Recovery, now exist to help those students. These programs are national interventions that include "writing, exploring patterns and structures of the written language, reading opportunities at instructional and independent levels, and working with letter sounds and words" (Short, Kane, and Peeling, p.284). Children across the nation are having difficulty becoming proficient writers.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of poor writing skills in the primary grades, the teacher researchers used various tools to collect baseline data. These tools include writing interest surveys and initial writing rubrics to assess student writing performance.

Of the 24 students in Classroom A, 14 were involved in the process over the twelve-week period. In Classroom B, 13 of the 14 students participated. In Classroom C, 11 of the 24 were participants. The entire class was involved in the intervention, but scores were only reported based on the amount of parent signatures received. A writing rubric was developed by the researchers (Appendix B) to aid in the assessment process. A table showing the initial rubric scores, which were collected prior to the start of the intervention, is presented in table one. The scores are out of a possible 24 points.

Table One

Pre-Intervention Writing Rubric Scores

	Classroom A	Classroom B	Classroom C
Student 1	15	8	15
Student 2	13	10	12
Student 3	14	9	14
Student 4	11	9	10
Student 5	13	10	16
Student 6	14	9	10
Student 7	13	10	15
Student 8	16	8	12
Student 9	16	10	11
Student 10	16	9	12
Student 11	12	9	9
Student 12	10	9	12
Student 13	15	10	
Student 14	12		

The results from the first week's rubrics showed deficiencies in many of the students' writing skills. Letters and words were not formed correctly on the lines. In fact, many of the words were hard to decode because of the lack of handwriting as well as inventive or conventional spelling. Grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were missing components in their writing pieces. Structure was poor with many run-on and repetitive simple sentences. A majority of their work was limited to information given by the teacher led prompt. These writing errors led to the low scores achieved on the students' rubrics.

After taking an initial writing sample, the teacher researchers then administered a writing interest survey (Appendix F). The questions were dictated to the students as a whole group as the children circled their responses. The results of the survey were then tabulated and then transferred into pie graph form in Figures 1-10.

The first question on the survey asked the students how they would feel if they had to write about something that was familiar to them. This could include things that they have heard or seen at school, home, or outside. In the three classes the majority of students responded in the "happy" to "very happy" range, with 92% of Class B, 82% of Class C, and 65% of Class A. The second question asked the students how they would feel about writing a letter to obtain something they would like to purchase. Forty four percent of Class B, 36% of Class C, and 7% of Class A felt they would be "sad" to "very sad" about having to write a letter.

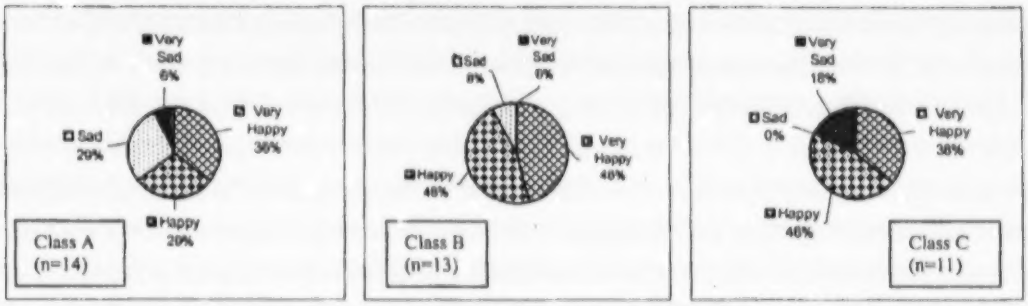

Figure 1. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 1: How would you feel if you wrote about something you have heard or seen?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

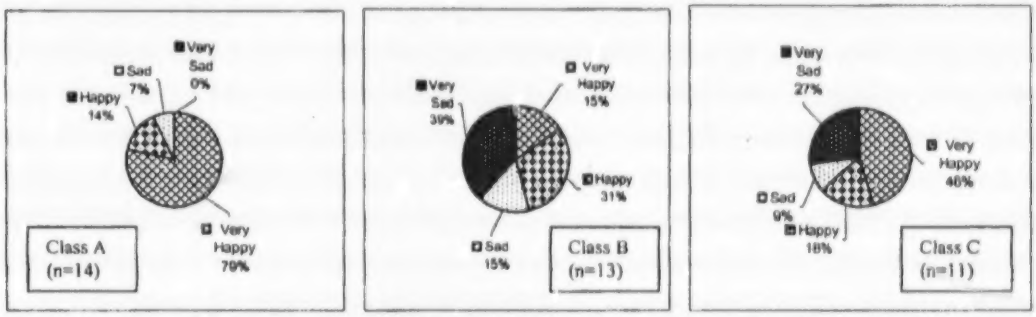

Figure 2. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 2: How would you feel writing a letter to a store asking about something you might buy there?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

The third question on the interest survey asked the children how they would feel about revising their writing. Fifty seven percent of Class A fell into the "happy" to "very happy" range, as well as 38% of Class B and 36% of Class C. The fourth question asked was how they would feel composing poetry for personal enjoyment. Thirty one percent of Class B fell into the "sad" to "very sad" range, as well as 18% of Class C and 14% of Class A.

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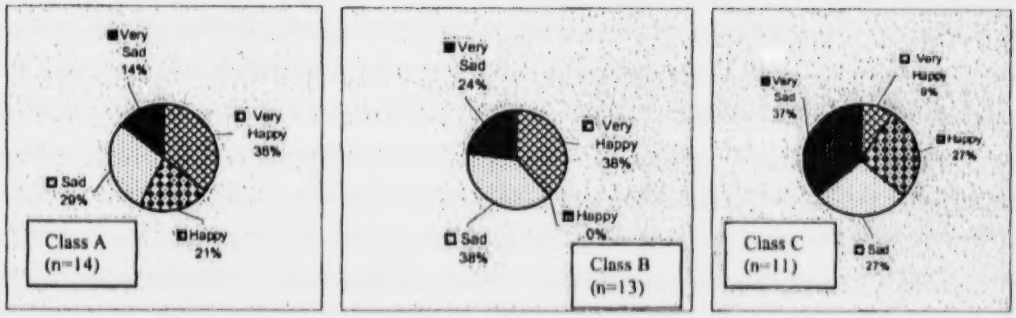

Figure 3. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 3: How would you feel if your teacher asked you to go back and change some of your writing?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

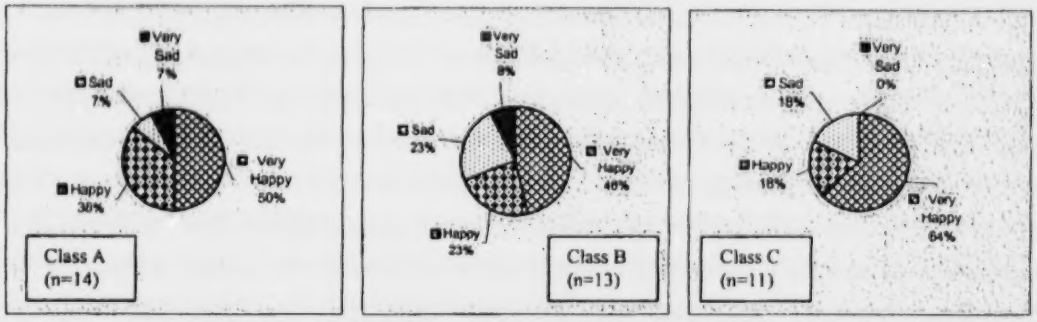

Figure 4. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 4: How would you feel writing poetry for fun?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

Question 5 asked how the children would feel if they had a job as a writer at a newspaper or magazine company. Fifty eight percent of Class A fell into the "happy" to "very happy" range, as well as 54% from Class C and 38% of Class B. The students were asked how they would feel if they improved their writing skills in Question 6. Twenty three percent of Class B would not be happy about becoming a better writer, where 14% of Class A and 0% of Class C were in the same category.

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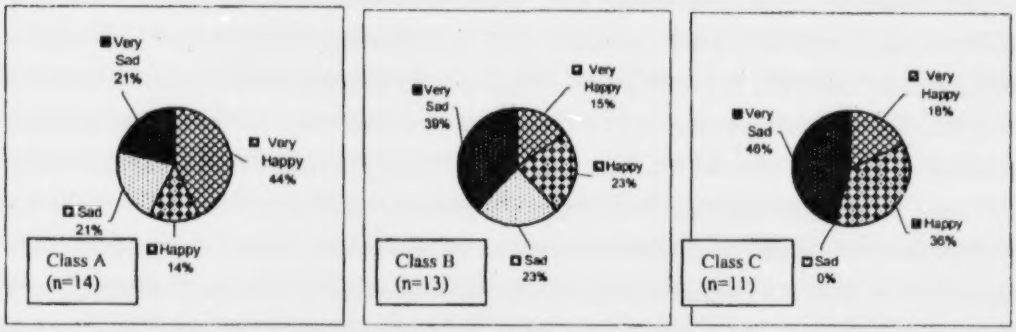

Figure 5. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 5: How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

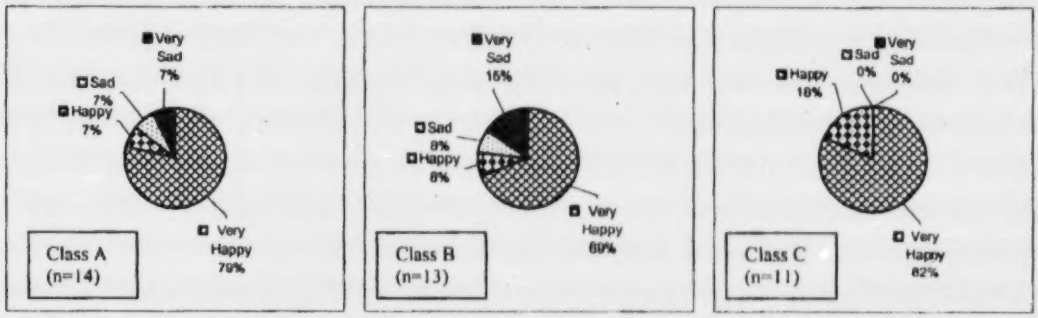

Figure 6. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 6: How would you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

Question 7 asked the students how they would feel about writing a story instead of doing homework. Sixty four percent of Class C would rather write a story than do their homework. Sixty two percent of Class B and 58% of Class A felt "happy" to "very happy" as well. The next question asked whether the students would rather write a story or watch television. Seventy seven percent of Class B would rather watch television, while 64% of Class C and 50% of Class A expressed the same feelings.

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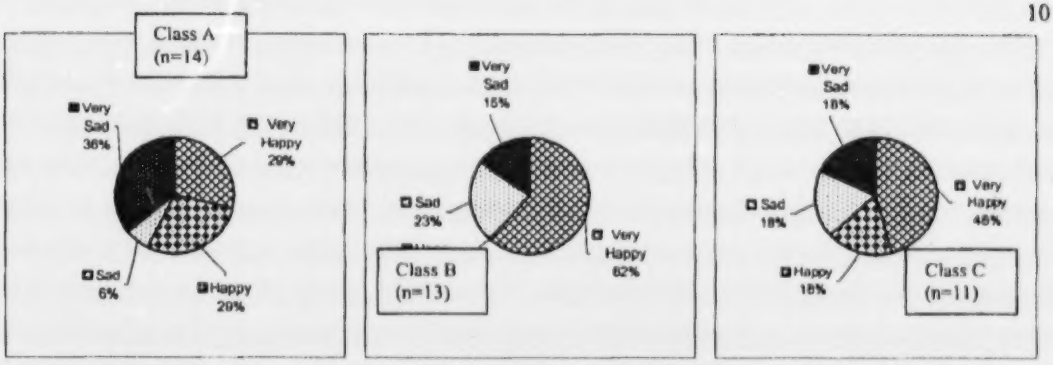

Figure 7. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 7: How would you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

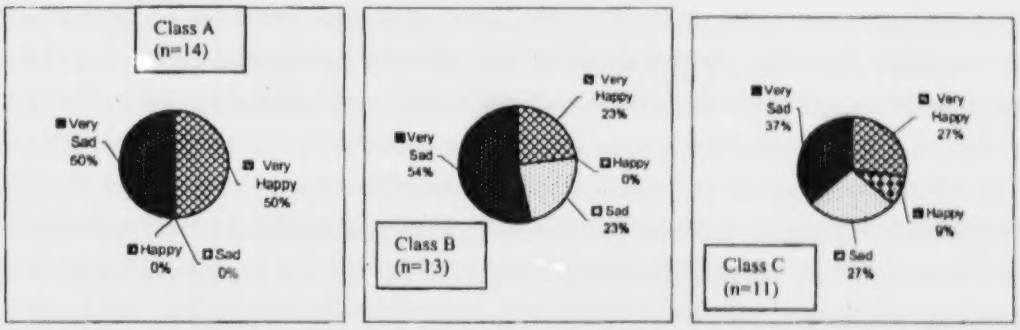

Figure 8. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 8: How would you feel about writing a story instead of watching TV?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

Question 9 asked how the students would feel if they were the author of a book. One hundred percent of both Class B and Class C would feel "happy" or "very happy" to write a book, while only 86% of Class A would enjoy being an author. When asked if the students would enjoy keeping a journal in class, 61% of Class B would be "sad" or "very sad", while 14% of Class A and 0% of Class C would be unhappy to keep a daily journal.

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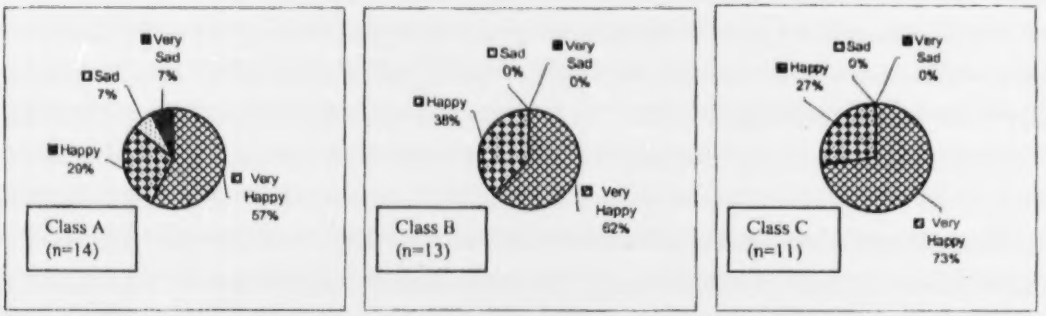

Figure 9. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 9: How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

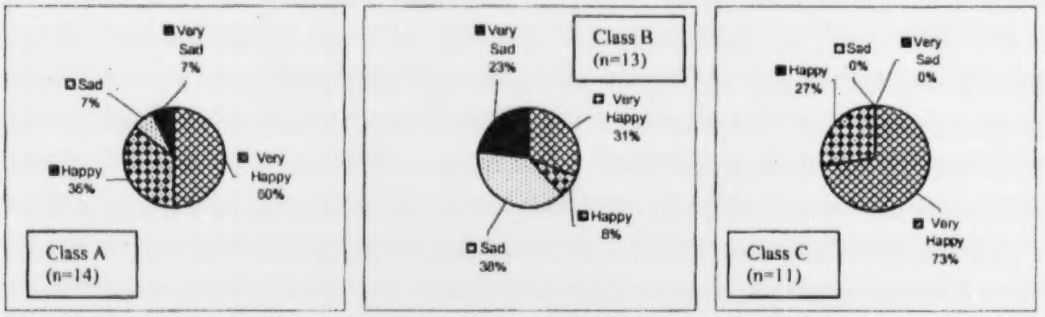

Figure 10. A graphic comparison of the pre-intervention answers for "Question 10: How would you feel keeping a journal for class?" on the Writing Interest Survey.

PROBABLE CAUSES

Many students have poor writing skills as a result of various educational and socioeconomic issues. Researchers have shown that possible problems include lack of student motivation toward writing, high state standards, and poor writing assessments. Other causes may be a lack of basic skills and balanced writing instruction in the classroom, language differences, and school and home values.

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According to Johns and Lenski (2000), writing instruction in elementary schools has made dramatic improvement over the past 25 years. This is a result of increased research conducted on the process of writing. To improve writing instruction, teachers need to have basic knowledge of the writing process. However, many teachers are lacking the training and understanding of the five stages of writing, which are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing. Without proper training, teachers may not recognize that the five stage writing process is a model that can be adapted to fit student needs. The writing process should be recursive, where "writers move back and forth between the stages as necessary" (Johns and Lenski, 2000, p.4). In some cases, teachers overlook the five stage writing process, while other teachers focus on the tedious requirement of using all five stages during every writing piece. This often results in an unbalanced literacy program.

Teachers and researchers have discovered that there is a strong link between motivation and literacy learning. The importance of this link is often neglected in many classrooms. Students who lack motivation tend to exhibit poor writing skills. When students see themselves as poor writers they will be less engaged in their writing (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). Upon entering school, most students come with a natural interest in writing (Essex, 1996). As children get older they gradually begin to lose that interest. Students realize that writing can be tedious, involves lack of choice, results in negative feedback, and takes a lot of effort (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosia, 2000). Student motivation decreases when they perceive that all of their "hard work is awash in a tidal wave of red ink" (Poindexter and Oliver, 1998, p.420). Too often teachers rely on corrections and negative feedback as their method of

instruction and assessment. As teachers, we feel frustrated when our students lack interest and success in the area of writing.

Lack of student choice in writing decreases motivation for emerging writers. Without allowing some student choice, teacher led instruction does not give students the opportunity to have ownership of their writing. Therefore, the writing piece is owned by the teacher rather than the student (Davenport & Eckberg, 2001). Without student choice, students' opinions and self-efficacy are not validated (Pettig, 2000). Teachers need to be aware of their students' thoughts on writing in order to have success in the classroom. To be able to display student work, it must be work that the students wanted to create and are proud to show. As Taylor and Adelman suggest, classrooms must "address student motivation as an antecedent, process and outcome statement" (1999, p.352). While motivation should play a major role in the writing process it is often neglected. Without the motivation, the students cannot and will not perform to their best ability.

Setting standards high seems to be a current trend in education. Policy makers are calling for greater accountability, improved curriculum instruction, increased discipline, reduced school violence, and higher overall standards for school (Taylor & Adelman, 1999). Most often, those that are only distant observers of the everyday classroom set state standards. Looking at one, or comparing two, very different populations without observing socioeconomic and cultural factors sets the state standards. For example, using the format of comparing low income to wealthy school areas does not authentically assess student growth. Unfortunately, this is a disadvantage for the teachers and the students, as well as their families and other community members.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Process (1998), many students are able to perform at a low level while few can exhibit strong writing skills. When fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders were tested only a quarter of their writing skills scored at a proficient level. In fact, 60% reached basic level, 16% could not meet basic standards, and a small 1% achieved an advanced level (Wildavsky, 1999). Given these results, it is evident that the scores are used to signal failure and not to portray or explain its causes (Wolf and White, 2000). Illinois begins testing students' writing skills on state tests in the third grade. However, according to Kear, Coffman, McKenna,& Ambrosio (2000), emphasis on writing is primarily given to the intermediate grades. Primary classrooms do not have consistent standards by which to assess their students. Due to the lack of grade level writing standards, teachers are left without the appropriate tools to successfully instruct their emerging writers.

There is a lack of valid and reliable authentic assessment instruments available for classroom teachers and researchers (Johns & Lenski, 2000). For primary grades there are no state mandated assessment tools, and the tools that do exist lack depth and quality. Therefore, teachers use their own personal framework to assess student writing. These frameworks may contain opinions that other teachers do not share (Glazer, 1994). All teachers have their own personal biases and hidden curriculums, which often affect the evaluation process. In addition, teachers do not have valid and reliable tools that focus on skills and contain consistent criteria for what is to be evaluated (Essex, 1996). Unfortunately, students and teachers share the need for better materials. Students do not benefit from the kind of diagnostic tools that could help them become reflective writers and strengthen their metacognitive awareness (Courtney & Abodeed, 1999).

Often times, even the purpose of assessment itself is not authentic. Policy makers assess students through the use of state tests. However, after the data is collected they do not evaluate, which consists of describing, analyzing, and reflecting on the data (Manning & Manning, 1996). Without the careful evaluation of the scores teachers are unable to use the information to improve their writing curriculum. The current diagnostic tools are used to create a ranking of students rather than as means to actively improve their writing skills. In some cases, teachers put their focus on labeling their students as poor writers instead of trying to help them learn how to succeed as writers. As Rothman suggests, the capabilities of assessment itself may have surpassed the level of writing instruction in many schools (1992). Without the correlation of writing instruction and assessment, teachers tend to break away from authentic assessment and use standardized testing. Therefore, teachers just know that their students are performing poorly, which is not a true assessment. Standardized tests seem to only test students on their inabilities rather than their capabilities. Assessment should not be an endpoint but a tool to help students reflect on their writing and set goals (Townsend & Fu, 1997). Teachers do not always remember that the main goal of writing instruction is to create reflective, independent writers.

Some teachers attempt to use authentic assessment with their classroom. Some examples include portfolio collection, student checklists, rubrics, and individual conferencing. However, even though their goal is to achieve authenticity, some teachers fall short of this expectation. For example, if portfolios are used, "careful consideration needs to be given to what goes into a portfolio, the process of selection, and how the information is to be used" (Farr, 1991, p.1). If this does not occur the portfolio simply

becomes a folder of useless documents rather than a record of a students literacy development.

Grammar and spelling are the major tools commonly used to assessing student writing. However, by solely comparing learners with each other, categorizing students by their ability, and focusing on students with learning disabilities, teachers and administrators are separating assessment from the teaching and learning interaction (Townsend & Fu, 1997). There is a strong connection between the methods we use to instruct and the results we obtain from assessment. Rather than using assessments as a tool for growth, it is used to judge performance, which leads to school and self-defeat. Instead of evaluating students against themselves and observing growth, peers are compared against other peers using spelling test and grammatical data.

According to Chapman (1990), the role writing plays in people's academic, vocational, social, and personal lives, as well as the development of students' ability to write, should be a main priority of schooling. Yet, in today's classroom, the current trends in education seem to be overpowering the teaching of these basic concepts. Whole language, cooperative learning, and thematic units become the priority over skills. Furthermore, these trends are not used in the classroom long enough to effectively give students consistency in the classroom.

In turn, basic skills instruction is not combined with these current educational trends and therefore students are lacking these foundations for writing. On the other hand, there are students that have mastered the basic skills in writing, but in turn "cannot write precise, engaging, and coherent prose appropriate to their grade level" (Manzo, 1999, p.1). Situations such as these leave teachers with the decision of what aspect of

writing is needed most in their classroom. Therefore the focus of the lesson is not always differentiated based on student need and ability.

Unfortunately in today's classroom, teachers are instructing to their grade level and are not differentiating based on student need. Therefore, it only focuses on those ready for the lesson and minimizes the success and improvement of those lacking the basic skills (Townsend & Fu, 1997). These basic skills may include sentence and paragraph development, invented spelling, use of punctuation, and transition to conventional spelling. Differentiated instruction is a proactive approach to improving classroom learning for all students. However, it requires a change in teaching practices and an evolution in classroom climate (Pettig, 2000). Children do not feel comfortable receiving feedback from their teachers or their peers when they are not working at their own level. Students may begin to be compared to peers in the classroom rather than to their own developmental needs.

Another problem that leads to poor writing skills is the language difference between home and school. English dominates the language of American schools. However, children are sometimes exposed to different languages at school and at home. Little academic support is available for those students who struggle with a second language such as Spanish, Polish, Arabic, and other foreign dialects.

Students who struggle with a second language have difficulty translating because the basic fundamentals are different. Teachers may have a misconception between student writing fluency and comprehension of what they have written. This leads to inconsistencies between assessment and student performance. Teachers as well as some education experts are "at odds over whether to be alarmed or optimistic about students'

level of success with crucial communication skills" (Manzo, 1999, p.2). These skills, depending on the student and their language, may or may not affect the ability to perform in an English language writing environment. Just as native speaking students struggle with staying motivated while writing, bilingual students experience a lack of motivation with a strong suspicion with an inability to learn. This creates more of a challenge for the teacher to contend with lack of motivation, language barriers, and inadequate feelings of their writing ability.

As evidenced through our research, students have overall poor writing skills. These problems have stemmed from the following issues: lack of student motivation, high state standards, poor assessments, lack of basic skills instruction, language differences, unbalanced writing programs, and differing school and home values. Due to a combination of these causes, the students in today's classroom are struggling writers.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature review

As previously stated, students in today's schools exhibit poor writing skills. There are many possible solution strategies that can be used to help guide teacher instruction and aid in student learning. These strategies can include rubrics, writing workshop, mini-lessons, interactive writing, and student choice. Other possibilities may include allowing for illustrated writing, portfolios, and conferencing.

Rubrics help teach as well as evaluate student work. Rubrics are an effective way of concretely assessing students in their performance. According to Andrade (2000), rubrics give students detailed feedback about their work in progress and give authentic assessment of their final project. There are two main features that all rubrics have. First, students are assessed based on the criteria that the teacher feels is significant to the assignment. Then a scale is created to determine student performance. The performance should range from poor to excellent. Rubrics are authentic assessments that make teachers expectations clear and concise, not subjective. The students feel less pressure when working on their project because they know ahead of time what is expected from them. Prior to using the rubric teachers need to clearly explain the elements of the tool. When creating a rubric, teachers should be aware of the following points. These points are: to have knowledge of the curriculum that is to be assessed, time allotment, awareness of the student's abilities, and high expectations that leave the students feeling unsuccessful.

According to Fiderer (1993), a workshop is "a setting in which artists or craftsmen are involved in a variety of hands-on creative activities" (p. 8). If a classroom teaches writing in a workshop approach, it is organized with the tools necessary for instruction. These may include writing tools and materials, publishing tools, published books and magazines, cumulative writing folders, and editing materials. The main idea behind writing workshop is that the activities will vary for each student because each writer may be at a different stage of the writing process. Another important component of the workshop is conferencing, in groups, as individuals and with peers. Fiderer believes that if teachers implement a workshop approach in their classrooms, they are more likely to create "the kind of individualized and interactive learning environment that best supports the writing process" (p. 8).

Writing workshop is successful in many classrooms because it assumes the approach of developing the skills writers already possess, with the assumption that writing is not only an art, but also a craft (Oates, 1997). Oates claims that writers are born with a love for communicating with language, and writing workshops provide them with the opportunity to be original and creative with their work. The teacher takes on the role of an editor rather than that of a teacher. The students are also given opportunities to be editors, and thoughtful criticism is expected. Writing workshop is successful because it is interactive and individualized, and it provides children with feedback that gives them the desire to improve their writing.

One of the first steps a teacher takes in a writing exercise is a mini-lesson. The purpose of the mini-lesson is to provide students with a model of what writers do (Cunningham, Hall, and Sigmon, 1999). A teacher would typically teach a mini-lesson

by spending ten minutes modeling the process of writing. The teacher would usually do this with an overhead projector or on chart paper, and he or she would model concepts such as thinking aloud, sounding out a word, looking at the Word Wall, and using invented spelling. After the modeling is done, the students would then help the teacher edit the piece using items on an editor's checklist. Without using a mini-lesson prior to student writing time, the children are not able to observe what is expected of them as writers. Students need to have the expectations modeled for them in order for them to use the strategies in their own writing.

One effective strategy is interactive writing. According to McCarrier, Pinnell, and Fountas (2000), the purpose of interactive writing is not only to provide demonstrations that allow children to make progress in their own writing, but also to invite the children to participate in the writing process. Like mini-lesson activities, interactive writing helps children become aware of the structures and patterns of written language. Demonstrations are provided in both instructional methods to help students become familiar with writing skills and language conventions. However, interactive writing gives students the opportunity not only to compose the text, but also to construct it. Children not only participate in verbal dialogue about the text, but they also physically write selected words and letters in the writing piece. McCarrier, Pinnell, and Fountas believe the important underlying concepts in interactive writing include writing for an authentic purpose, sharing the task of writing, having conversations about the writing, creating a common text, using conventions of language, and connecting reading and writing.

Choice can be a highly motivating feature in the writing curriculum. By providing students with the opportunity to make some of their own decisions, teachers can "validate a student's opinions and promote self-efficacy" (Pettig, 2000, p. 17). Giving the students a choice in at least one aspect of a lesson, whether it be the content, activity, or product, children are given the opportunity to shape some of their own learning. Davenport and Eckberg (2001) feel that allowing student choice in materials also aides in the writing process by helping "bring their words to life" (p. 562). This may help motivate them to improve their own writing skills. Teachers can provide choice by allowing students to pick their own picture prompt, having free choice topics, or giving options for publications. Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio (2000) suggest that lack of choice in student writing may result in teachers facing an "up-hill battle as they attempt to foster positive writing attitudes in their students" (p. 15). In fact, Poindexter and Oliver (1998-99) claim that a child will write more on unassigned topics rather than teacher assigned topics. In addition, children who have ownership of their writing appear to go through the three general stages of writing on their own. These three general stages are pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. Teachers want their children to enjoy writing, and one way to keep them motivated and positive about the writing process is to allow some student choice during instruction.

According to Sidelnick and Svoboda (2000), drawing can move "children from the visual to the spoken word and then to the written word" (p. 174). Writing and drawing can have strong connections to each other. Writing first starts as a mental image, and drawing the idea can help children to create a visual representation. Illustrating and drawing can help motivate children to want to learn to read and write

(Sidelnick & Svoboda, 2000). Drawing can also make writing intrinsically interesting, and the fear of failure will be less because the assignments value personal expression and accomplishment.

A successful way to start emergent writing programs in the early grades is through "driting" (Cunningham, Hall, & Sigmon, 1999). In this process, students are asked to draw a picture significant to them. When their drawing is complete, they are encouraged to attempt to write words associated with the picture. These attempted words may include circle/line letter-like forms, complete words, symbols, or numbers. Driting is successful for students who may feel overwhelmed by the writing process. Driting is the first step in practicing connecting print to pictures.

Portfolios are a collection of student work that creates a detailed view of the child's progress and skills. According to Courtney and Abodeeb (1999), portfolios are different depending on the work selected and how teacher and students choose them. Therefore, they should be a collection of relevant work and not just a folder full of random papers. The purpose of a portfolio is to help show effort, improvement, processes, and achievement. They can also show how students are consistently growing as writers and readers.

Portfolios help teachers improve their observation skills which helps them avoid making careless conclusions. The main goal of keeping a portfolio is to "help teachers redesign their curriculum and reorganize their teaching methods on the basis of their observations and reflections"(Yoo, 2001, p.80). Teachers need quiet time for themselves to look back at the students work and authentically assess and plan for future lessons (Manning, 2000). By looking at the work gathered in the student's portfolio, teachers are

better able to plan based on their students needs and abilities. Manning and Manning (1996) also feel that portfolios offer teachers an alternative to standardized testing to assess their writers. Without portfolios teachers would haphazardly teach and assess skills that do not meet the needs of the students.

According to Farr (1991), portfolios allow teachers to construct an organized, continuous, and descriptive view of learning that has already taken place, as well as learning to be done in the future. An ideal way for teachers to help students understand the importance of their portfolio is to model a portfolio. The teacher will show student work that it relevant to a child's learning experience and explain why each one helps aide in their education. Also, when assessing student work it is important for the teacher to provide a copy of the form that will be used. An example of such tools would be a rubric or checklist that sets the criteria for the upcoming project. Leaving a copy in the student's portfolio will give him or her the chance to research and weed out what is and is not important.

Students benefit from portfolios because they help them see their progress through a timeline and collection that they help create. By doing so the students have ownership and pride in the work they know is pertinent to their education. When goals are set in a collaborative way, the students tend to become more excited and prepared for upcoming lessons. They are aware of what is to be expected and have concrete examples of appropriate student work. In doing this they can assess their own work and edit to their satisfaction.

The purpose of assessment itself can be a solution strategy. This is apparent by changing the goal of assessment from ranking students to helping them make new goals

for themselves. According to Townsend and Fu (1997), assessment should be a central part of a curriculum instead of an endpoint or a letter to add to your grade book. For assessment to be useful students should be encouraged to be risk takers and make reflections on their writing. Students need to play a central part in assessing their own work. Manning (1999) suggests students can become active in the evaluation process by taking part in a letter triad. Triad writing allows students to write a letter to his or her parent while the teacher writes a letter to both the child and the parent. The parents then complete the triad by writing the child back.

Conferencing is a valuable tool for teachers to discover the developmental levels of their students. There are three different types of conferencing: on the spot conferences, instructional conferences, and individual editing conferences (Lenski & Johns, 2000). On the spot conferences allow the teacher to move around the room and aid students in their writing process while they are writing. Instructional conferences bring a handful of students with similar writing problems together for small group editing. This conference takes place after the first draft is completed and looked over by the teacher. Individual editing conferences are a one to one consultation with a student to help them with various writing issues such as grammar and sentence structure. All three of these pieces help with the editing in a more positive and self-reflective way. Other than the students writing pieces, teachers are encouraged to use assessment tools such as rubrics to help children understand the elements of writing (Glazer, 1994).

In conclusion, there are several techniques that could be incorporated into the curriculum to strengthen students writing skills. The techniques vary according to teaching styles and students abilities. After researching the many solution strategies we

implemented conferencing, portfolios, rubrics, and mini-lessons in our classroom. Research suggested that portfolios and conferencing are the most beneficial and authentic.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of guided writing and use of portfolios, during the period of September 2001 to December 2001, the primary students will increase their knowledge and understanding of the writing process, as measured by teacher constructed checklists and reviews of student portfolios.

In order to accomplish the project objective the following processes are necessary:

1. Mini guided writing lessons modeled by teachers and followed by students will occur regularly.
2. Allow students to practice their skills by providing them daily independent writing time.
3. Student conferences will be held to discuss individual writing strengths and weaknesses.
4. Writing portfolios will be used to authentically assess student work.

Action Plan

The three teachers will spend the first week of the intervention creating writing portfolios and introducing students to journal writing. The targeted students will be administered a writing interest survey during the first week (Appendix E). Each teacher will then spend 12 weeks teaching guided mini-lessons while their students generate

samples for writing portfolios. Elements of the portfolios include independent writing and completed teacher checklists used during student conferences.

The students will begin their writing block with a teacher directed mini-lesson. The lessons will cover a variety of pre-writing and beginning writing skills. The lessons will last approximately 5-10 minutes in length, and will occur at the beginning of a 25 minute daily writing block. The teacher will model appropriate writing at the chalkboard or overhead projector, with students participating at desks. The guided writing mini-lessons will provide students with the opportunity to see teacher think-alouds, decoding strategies, proper handwriting and spacing, and emerging editing skills.

After the guided mini-lesson, the students will be given 10 minutes to write independently in their journals. The children will be given the opportunity to use a teacher generated prompt, or they may use a free choice topic (Appendix G). The students are also given a time during that period to create an illustration of their written work. The students are encouraged to do self or peer editing if time allows. The students are given this independent time so that they can practice the skills demonstrated during the guided mini-lesson.

Bi-weekly, the students will be assigned a private conference with the teacher to discuss their writing strengths and weaknesses. These conferences will occur during the guided writing time and will last approximately 5 minutes in length. Students will be given the opportunity to ask questions and gain a better understanding of the writing process on a one-to-one basis. The teacher will use a checklist to authentically assess each child's work (Appendices C & D). The checklists are designed for the writing

development of each grade level. The students who have a conference will be given time to share their work with the class if they so choose.

Throughout the 12 weeks, the students' work will be collected and placed into individual writing portfolios. The portfolios will be used during both student and parent conferences to show student writing progress. They will include random journal entries, as well as student-selected samples. The teacher will also complete writing checklists, which will be attached to assessed writing samples (Appendices C & D). These checklists will be completed during the bi-weekly student conferences and the results will be shared with the individual students. The portfolios will be stored within the classroom and will be maintained by the teachers. During the sixth and twelfth week of the intervention, the teacher will evaluate the quality and quantity within the student portfolios using the 6 Week Assessment (Appendix F).

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effect of the intervention, checklists covering the skills for primary writers will be developed. In addition, portfolios of student work will be kept throughout the intervention. Here six and twelve week assessments will be used to evaluate portfolio collections. Biweekly conferences with students will help guide the learning process. Finally, an interest survey will be given to measure student interest in writing both at the beginning and end of the intervention (Appendix E).

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of our action research project was to improve writing skills at the first and second grade levels. We attempted to achieve this through the use of mini-lessons, independent writing time, conferences, and the collection of writing portfolios. The intervention was used in three different classrooms at the same elementary school. While our teaching styles vary, we all used the project objectives, action plan, and processes to guide our instruction. For purposes of the Historical Description of the Intervention, we have written in first person.

Classroom A

Classroom A is a large second grade classroom with two of four walls almost entirely windows. The desks are arranged in cooperative groups of five to six students to allow for collaboration between the 25 students. There is enough space in the center of the desks for my overhead projector. On the wall above the chalkboard, I have hung a word wall. I also have word family posters on the wall and sight word dictionaries in each student desk to assist with writing. Finally, I have various writing centers around the room available for independent practice.

Throughout the intervention, I used the mini-lesson, independent writing, and conferencing format for my second grade writing instruction. A typical writing lesson in my classroom during the twelve weeks began with a mini-lesson on the overhead projector. I would give a writing prompt to the students, and then pretend that I was a student completing the prompt on the screen. I would focus on a specific skill, such as

writing a complete sentence or correctly using a period, but I would also make mistakes for them to find. When I was finished writing, the students would help me correct my errors. When we finished, the students would be given fifteen minutes of independent writing time, and then five more minutes to either complete their writing or to make an illustration.

During writing time, I attempted to conference with the students individually. I tried to hear about two to three students a day. When their writing time was completed, about three to five students volunteered to share their writing with the class. At the end of the day, I would file their writing into a folder labeled with their name in my hanging file portfolios. If they had conferenced with me that day, I also included their completed checklist.

Throughout the course of the twelve weeks I had to make some adaptations to my intervention. Because of scheduling issues, my writing periods on Tuesdays were only fifteen minutes long. Instead of doing a mini-lesson and sharing with an assigned topic, I gave the students free choice writing on Tuesdays. Also, because I had a large class of 25 students, I was not always able to conference as I had planned. On some days, I simply monitored the classroom and helped students as they needed and conferenced with them individually during our silent reading period. On other days I would do roaming conferences, where I would approach students at their desks and only check for a few items on the checklist rather than completing the entire thing.

Classroom B

Classroom B is a first grade classroom with thirteen students. My classroom is fairly big with six large windows that make up one of the four walls. The windows face

west, which provides a very sunny atmosphere in the afternoon. The wall that is opposite of the windows is a chalkboard that runs through the length of the room. This chalkboard is used daily to help guide my lesson instruction. Above the chalkboard is an alphabet strip and below the chalkboard is a word wall. Both of these tools help to aid myself and the students during the day. The north wall of the classroom is a bulletin board that runs the length of the room. This board consists of the calendar, weather graph, season tree, tooth chart, time and money stations, hundreds, tens and ones pocket chart and also the classroom job board. These items are used for instruction every morning in the classroom. The fourth wall in the classroom that faces south consists of another bulletin board that is used to display student work. Underneath the board is the reading corner with baskets of leveled books and a carpeted area for the students.

In this classroom, the students sit in individual desks that are grouped into tables of four. My desk is located in the north west corner of the room. There is also an extra round table with chairs that is used for one on one teacher student contact.

Writing time is done four days a week after lunch when the students return from recess. The first step in the writing instruction is the guided mini-lesson. This is usually done with either the chalkboard or the over head projector. The guided mini-lesson consists of teacher modeling writing to the students and stressing different concepts to the students. In the beginning of the intervention the guided mini-lessons focused on beginning a sentence with a capital letter and ending with correct punctuation. The mini-lesson would also stress to the students the importance of re-reading the writing and self-correcting errors. The guided mini-lesson would generally last around ten minutes. After the guided mini-lesson the students would have around fifteen minutes to write

individually. Their writing would usually stem from a prompt given by me. After about ten minutes of writing I would then call students one at a time for an individual student conference. I would use the conference checklist to help assess the students writing piece. I would conference with every student on a bi-weekly basis. After the individual writing time ends, there would be five minutes of sharing time for students.

Classroom C

During the intervention I used my classroom layout to help assist the students with their writing needs. It is laid out to accommodate different student centers. The desks are in groups of six to encourage peer collaboration. There is a word wall to assist student spelling, two large tables to use for conferencing and independent work, and school supplies for all students to use.

A typical day in my classroom consists of daily attendance and lunch order first thing in the morning. Then the students proceed to daily specials such as Art, Music, and/or Gym. Following a bathroom break and spelling or word wall activities, the students begin their writing block. I open a writing topic by introducing the subject, either through a story or inviting conversation. Next, I model my thinking process aloud as I begin to write my story on the board. These stories begin with an open ended writing topic that each student has some background knowledge of. The teacher modeled writing lasts approximately 10 minutes based on topic and student need. Once the topic has been modeled the students are given 15 minutes to write on their own. Students then come to myself on assigned days for conferencing. While the student is conferencing with me, the others will self or peer edit as well as the option to illustrate their writing.

There were some adaptations to my classroom and lesson plans based on student need and individual teaching style. Being that we had specials first thing in the morning, it made it difficult at times to use an entire writing time at once. Often, we had to split the time or even shorten it. This did not seem to effect the students, as this was part of a routine they were used to. Also, the size of the classroom and student attendance modified my conferencing dates and times. In order to conference with students that were absent I had to use silent reading or indoor recess time. In some cases, roaming conferences were needed to allow for multiple conferences.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Before the intervention began, the teachers assigned a writing prompt to the students and gave them independent time to write about it without any direct instruction. This sample was then graded using a writing rubric (Appendix B) and used as the baseline data for the intervention. Then, every three weeks the same rubric was used to record their writing progress during the course of the intervention. The lowest possible rubric score was a six; with the highest possible being a 24. To see the individual students scores, read Tables 1-3 below. At the six-week mark, an assessment tool (Appendix F) was used to assess the quality and quantity of work kept in their writing portfolio. This assessment tool was also used to create a goal for the students to work towards. At the end of the twelfth week, the writing rubric was used once more to acquire a final measure of their writing progress. A twelve-week assessment was not used by the teachers because they felt that it was unnecessary due to the amount of individual student conferencing. Also, it was felt that the students would not benefit from being told a new writing goal before a two-week winter break.

Table 2

Student Scores from Classroom A on Writing Rubrics at the Five Assessment Periods of the Intervention

Classroom A	Week 1	Week 4	Week 7	Week 10	Week 12
Student 1	15	18	19	21	21
Student 2	13	13	12	17	19
Student 3	14	15	15	15	17
Student 4	11	13	14	15	15
Student 5	13	14	13	13	14
Student 6	14	17	18	17	22
Student 7	13	16	16	20	18
Student 8	16	18	18	23	23
Student 9	16	18	18	23	23
Student 10	16	18	17	18	18
Student 11	12	16	18	19	20
Student 12	10	12	12	13	15
Student 13	15	17	14	19	21
Student 14	12	17	15	15	21

Table 3

Student Scores from Classroom B on Writing Rubrics at the Five Assessment Periods of the Intervention

Classroom B	Week 1	Week 4	Week 7	Week 10	Week 12
Student 1	8	9	14	15	15
Student 2	10	17	15	20	18
Student 3	9	15	11	9	12
Student 4	9	11	14	17	15
Student 5	10	14	20	18	18
Student 6	9	11	9	11	9
Student 7	10	11	21	19	18
Student 8	8	8	9	11	12
Student 9	10	12	15	16	17
Student 10	9	7	6	14	16
Student 11	9	12	13	15	12
Student 12	9	15	16	17	15
Student 13	10	10	12	14	12

Table 4

Student Scores from Classroom C on Writing Rubrics at the Five Assessment Periods of the Intervention

Classroom C	Week 1	Week 4	Week 7	Week 10	Week 12
Student 1	15	17	19	20	21
Student 2	12	16	16	19	23
Student 3	14	16	15	16	19
Student 4	10	11	15	15	13
Student 5	16	16	19	20	23
Student 6	10	18	17	18	16
Student 7	15	14	16	16	18
Student 8	12	12	15	15	14
Student 9	11	10	13	17	18
Student 10	10	12	15	15	14
Student 11	10	10	13	9	13
Student 12	12	11	13	16	15

All three classes used their baseline data to create an average score for their class. Classroom A had an average score of 13.6, Classroom B had an average score of 9.23, and Classroom C had an average score of 12.3. During the course of the intervention each class saw a steady overall increase in their rubric scores. At times, the scores varied slightly showing little or no growth between assessment periods. However, the long-term growth was significant in all three classrooms. After the twelve-week intervention, Classroom A had an average of 18.9, Classroom B had an average of 15, and Classroom C had an average of 18.7. Finally, Classroom A had an average growth of 5.3 points, Classroom B had an average growth of 5.7 points, and Classroom C had an average growth of 6.4 points. The standards of the rubric were set high; therefore none of the students achieved the highest score of 24 points.

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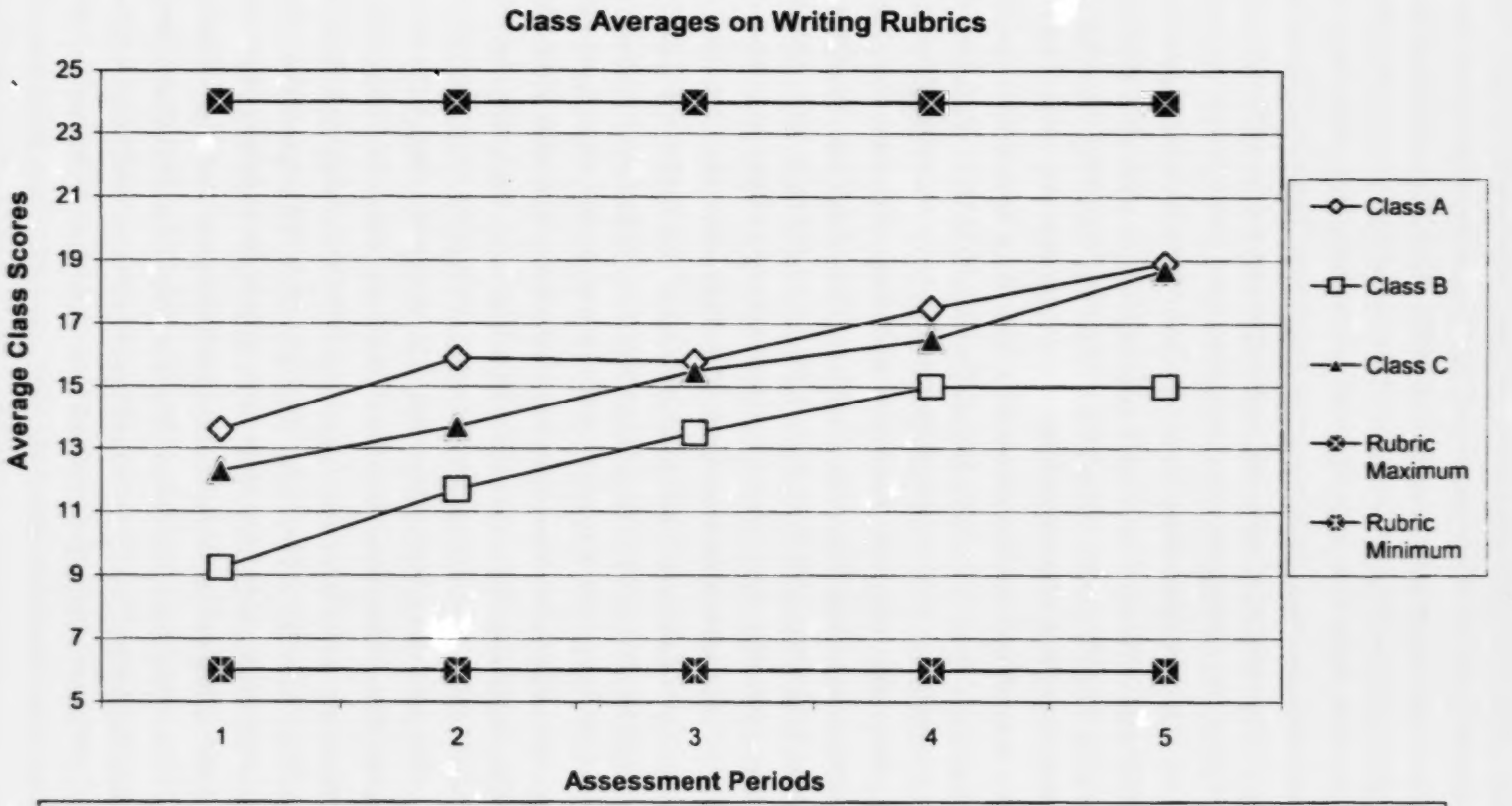


Figure 11 Class Averages on Writing Rubrics

This graph represents the average score at five grading periods during the intervention of all three classes. By looking at the results, it is apparent that Class A, B, and C showed an average increase of approximately 5 rubric points over the course of the intervention. The classes either maintained or improved their scores at each interval during the study.

The following is a summary of Figures 12 to 41, which will be presented after the text.

At the beginning and the end of the intervention we distributed a writing interest survey to each child (Appendix E). This survey was used to direct teacher lesson plans and gain knowledge about the students' feelings on writing. After the intervention students were asked how they would feel if they had to write about something familiar to them. Class A showed an increase of 35% of "happy" to "very happy" students. Class B maintained the same percentage of "happy" to "very happy" students, while Class C decreased by 27%. The second question asked the students how they would feel about writing a letter to obtain something they would like to purchase. There was a 21% increase in the amount of students in Classroom A that would feel "sad" to "very sad." Both Classroom B and C decreased by an average of 26%.

The third question on the interest survey asked the students how they would feel about revising their writing. All the students in Classrooms A, B, and C showed an increase of 15% to 28% in the "happy" to "very happy" range. The fourth question asked how they would feel composing poetry. Classroom A showed an increase of 7% of the students feeling "sad" to "very sad," while Classroom B decreased by 38%. Classroom C remained constant at 18%.

The fifth question asked the students how they would feel to become a writer for a newspaper or magazine. All the students in Classrooms A, B, and C showed and increase of 32% to 37% in the "happy" to "very happy" range. The sixth question asked the students how they would feel if they improved their writing skills. Classroom A

decreased by 7% in the "sad" to "very sad," while Classroom B decreased by 15%. Classroom C remained constant at 0%.

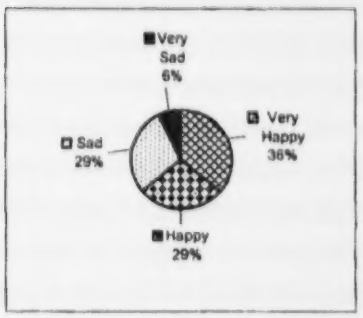
The seventh question asked the students how they would feel about writing a story instead of doing homework. Classrooms A and C showed an increase of 13% to 18% in the "happy" to "very happy" range. Classroom B decreased by 1%. The eighth question asked the students about how they would feel about writing a story instead of watching television. Classroom A decreased their feelings of "sad" to "very sad" by 14%, Classroom B decreased by 23%, and Classroom C showed marginal decrease of 1%.

The ninth question asked the students how they would feel if they were an author of a book. Classroom B decreased by 16% of the students feeling "happy" to "very happy," while Classroom A and B remained constant at 0%. The tenth question asked the students if they would enjoy keeping a journal in class. Classroom A remained constant, while Classroom B decreased by 46% in the "sad" to "very sad" range. Classroom C showed an increase of 45%.

Writing Survey Question 1

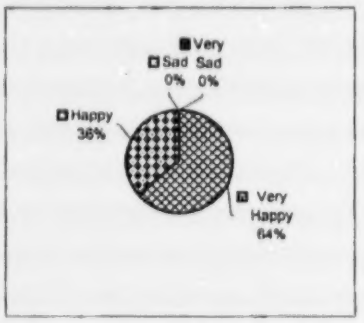
How would you feel if you wrote about something you have heard or seen?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

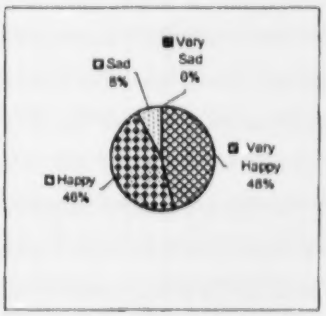
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

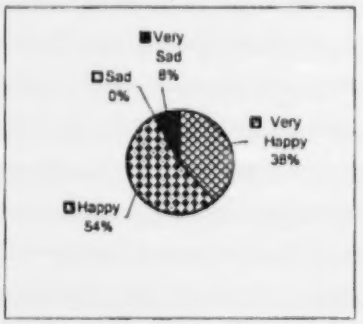
Figure 12 Classroom A saw more children happy about writing something they have seen after the intervention was completed. 100% of children were happy after the intervention while only 65% were at the beginning.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N=13

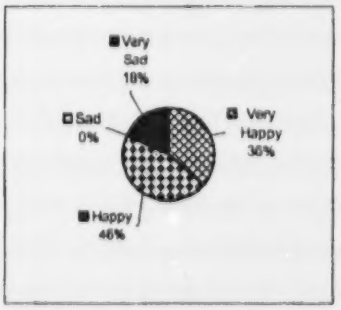
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

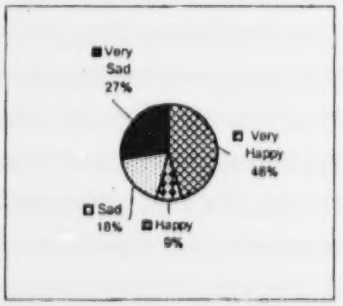
Figure 13 Classroom B saw no change in happy students during the course of the intervention. The only change was the 8% sad became very sad.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N= 11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 14 Classroom C saw a decrease in children who were happy to write about something they had seen or heard, with 82% happy pre-intervention and 55% post-intervention.

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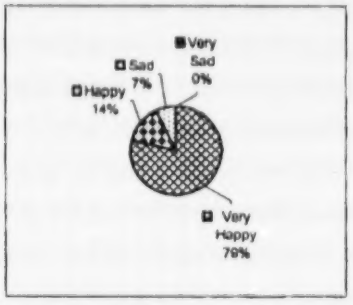
Writing Survey Question 2

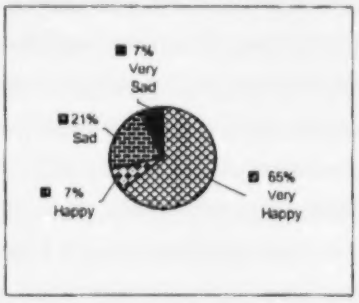
How would you feel writing a letter to a store asking about something you might buy?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

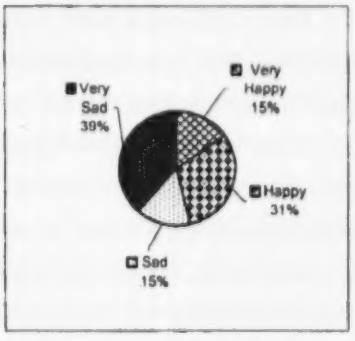
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

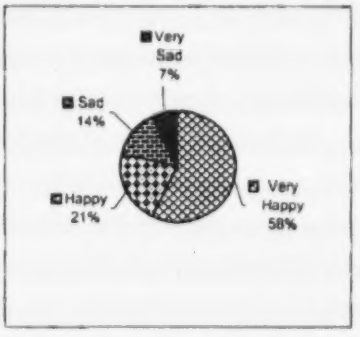
Figure 15 Classroom A saw more children unhappy about writing a letter after the intervention was completed. Only 72% were happy to do so, while 93% were before the intervention.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N= 13

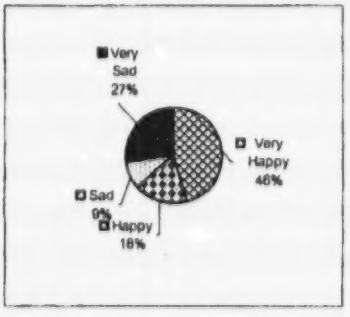
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

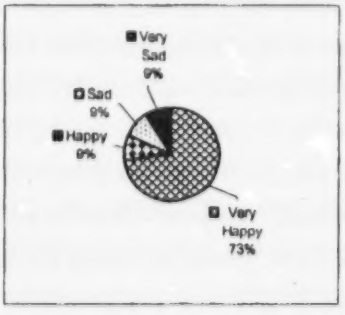
Figure 16 Classroom B saw a considerable increase in students who would be happy to write a letter. Before the intervention, only 46% would want to write a letter, but 79% would after the intervention was over.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N= 11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 17 Classroom C saw an increase in wanting to do letter writing, with 64% happy pre-intervention, and 81% happy post-intervention.

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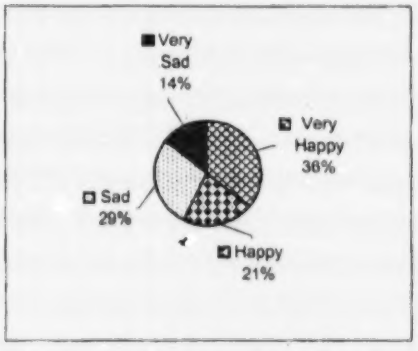
Writing Survey Question 3

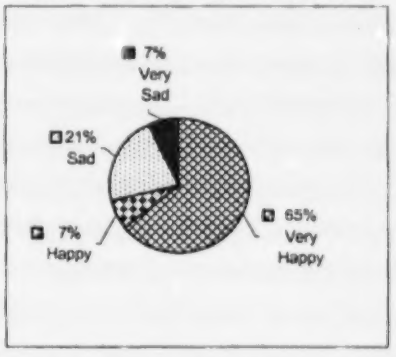
How would you feel if your teacher asked you to go back and change some of your writing?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

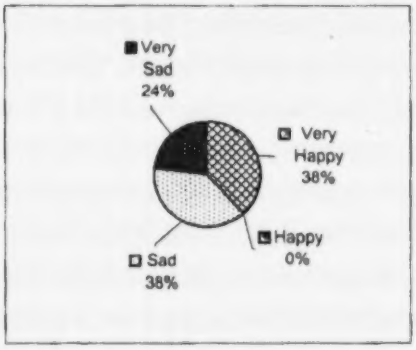
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

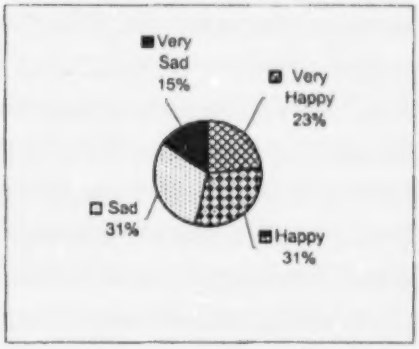
Figure 18 Classroom A saw a slight increase of students happy to edit their writing with a 15% increase.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N= 13

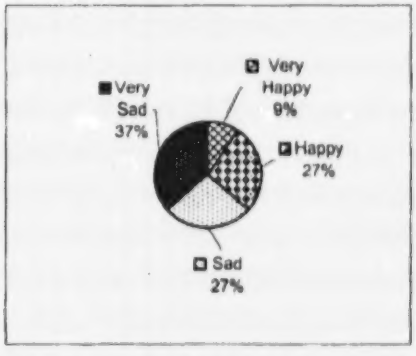
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

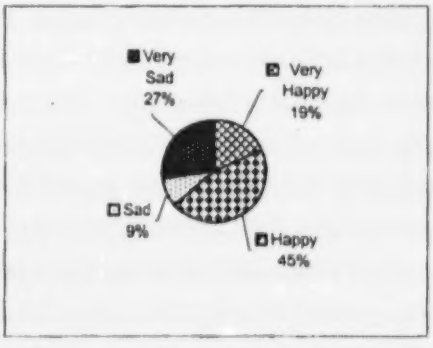
Figure 19 Classroom B showed a 16% increase in happy students when editing.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N= 11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 20 Classroom C saw an increase in children happy to edit with 36% happy pre-intervention and 64% post-intervention.

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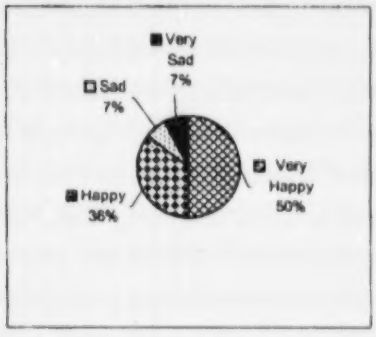
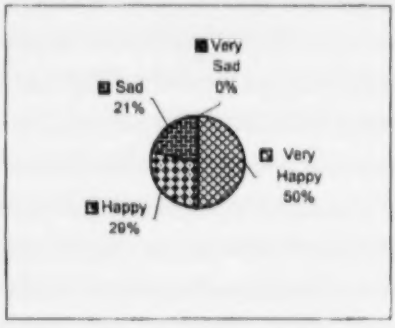
Writing Survey Question 4
How would you feel writing poetry for fun?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

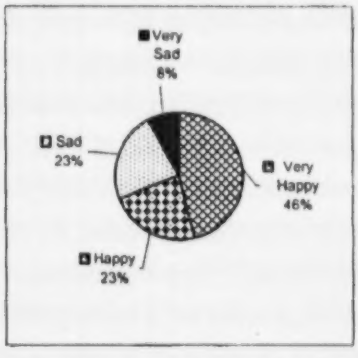
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

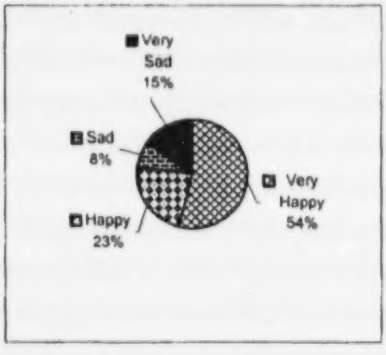
Figure 21 Classroom A saw a slight decrease of 7% in children happy to write poetry.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N=13

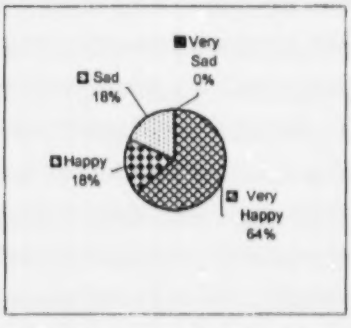
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

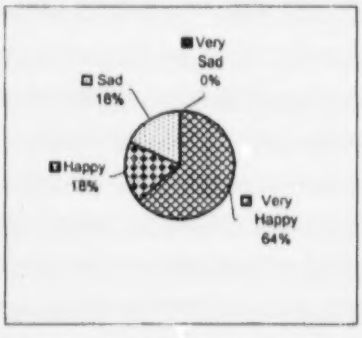
Figure 22 Classroom B saw a slight increase of 8% in children happy to write poetry.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N=11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 23 Classroom C showed no change from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention.

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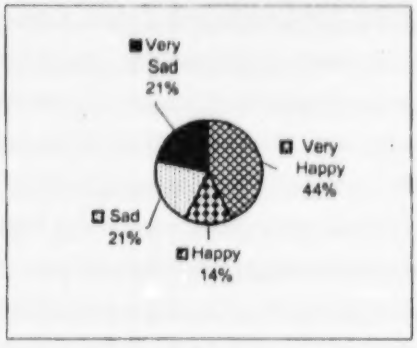
Writing Survey Question 5

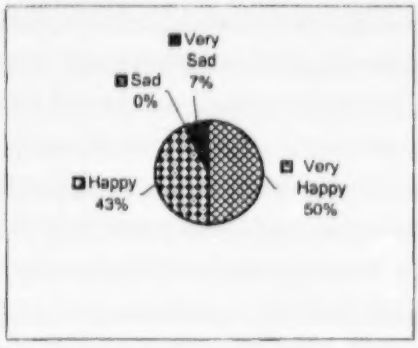
How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

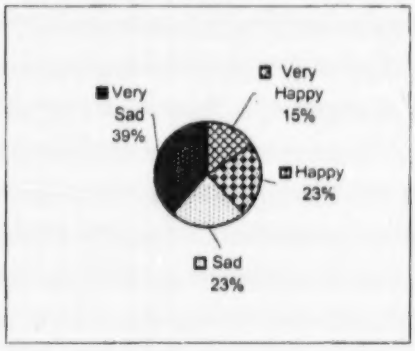
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

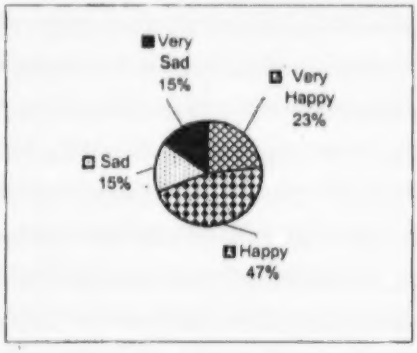
Figure 24 Classroom A showed a 36% increase in students who would be happy to be a writer for a newspaper or magazine.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N= 13

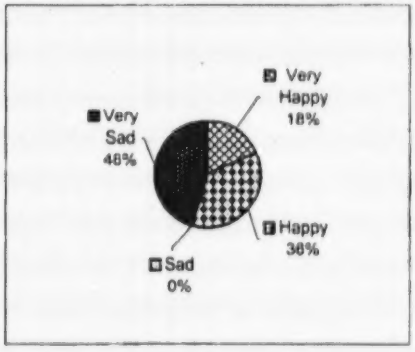
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

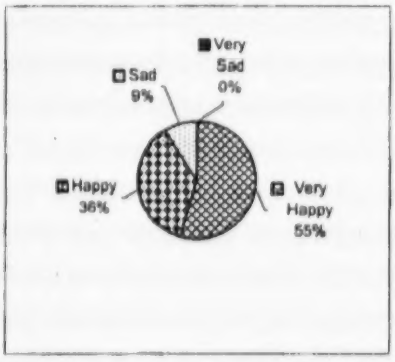
Figure 25 Classroom B showed a 24% increase in students who would be happy to write for a newspaper or magazine.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N= 11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 26 Classroom C showed an increase of 37% of children who would be happy to write for a newspaper or magazine.

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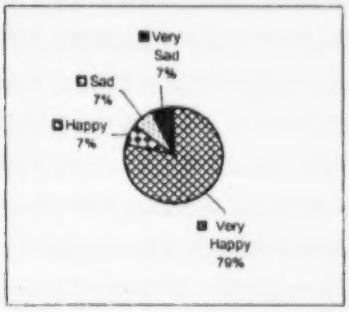
Writing Survey Question 6

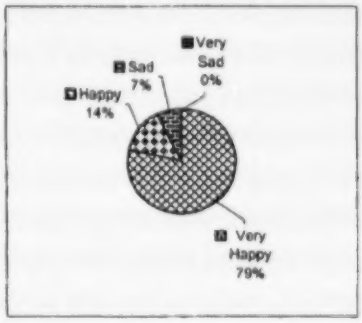
How would you feel about becoming a even better writer than you already are?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

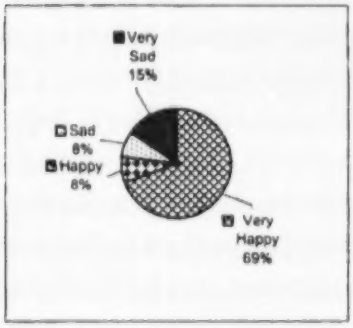
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

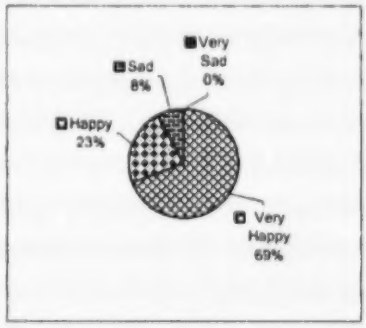
Figure 27 Classroom A showed a 7% increase in students who were happy to be a better writer than they already were.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N= 13

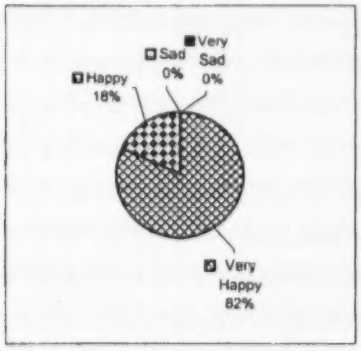
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

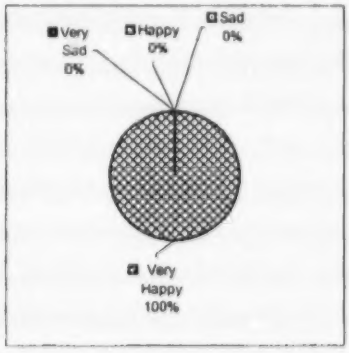
Figure 28 Classroom B showed an increase of 15% of children who were happy to become a better writer.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N=11

Class C Post- Intervention

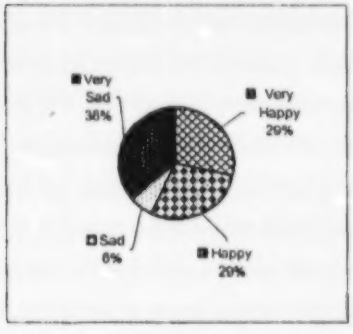


N=11

Figure 29 Classroom C was 100% "very happy" at the end of the intervention.

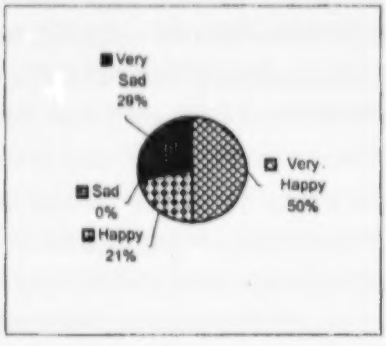
Writing Survey Question 7
How would you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

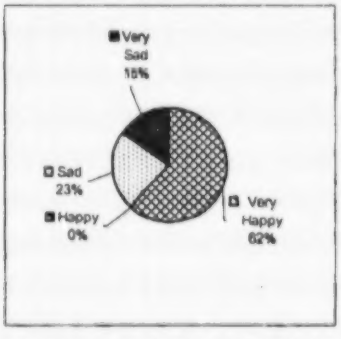
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

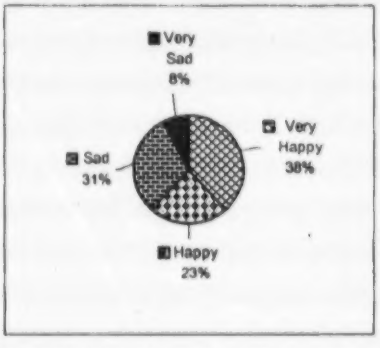
Figure 30 Classroom A showed an increase of 13% of happy students when given the choice of writing a story versus doing their homework.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N=13

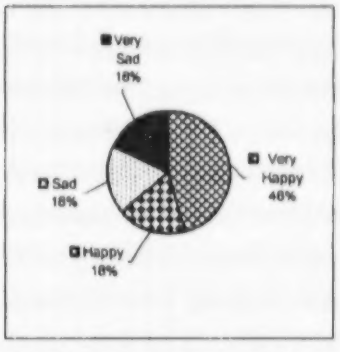
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

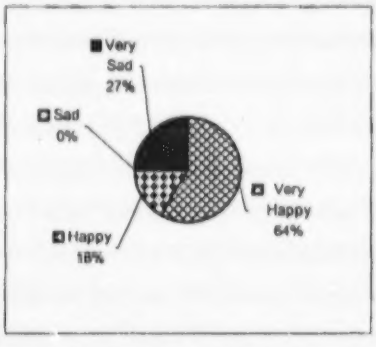
Figure 31 Classroom B had a slight decrease of 1% of happy students.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N= 11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 32 Classroom C showed an 18% increase in happy students.

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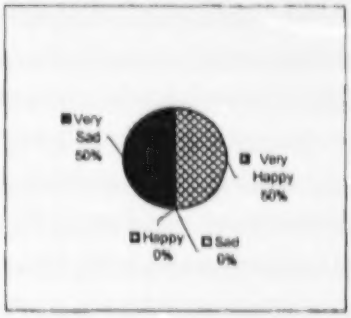
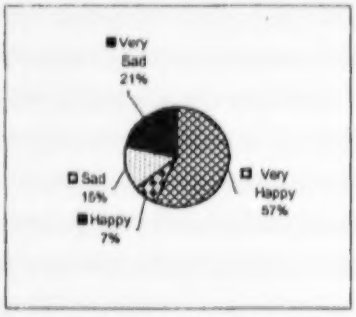
Writing Survey Question 8
How would you feel about writing a story instead of watching television?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

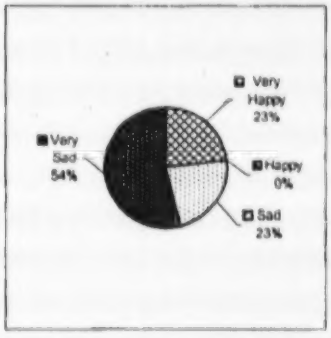
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

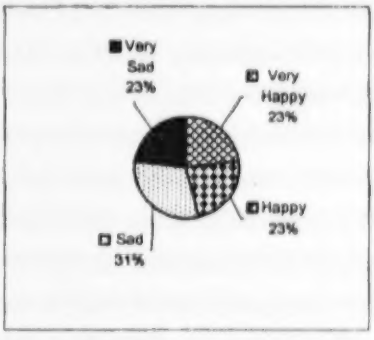
Figure 33 Classroom A showed a14% increase of students who would rather write a story than watch television.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N=13

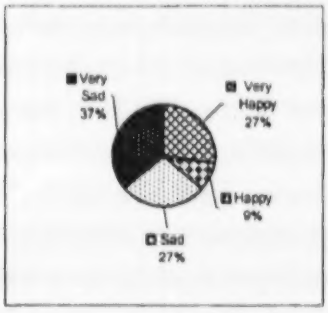
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

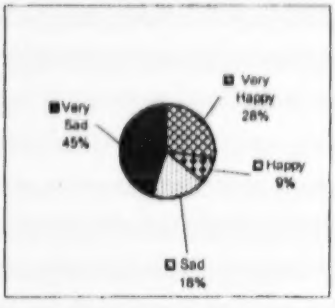
Figure 34 Classroom B showed a 23% increase of students who would rather write a story.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N=11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 35 Classroom C showed a 1% increase in students who would rather write a story.

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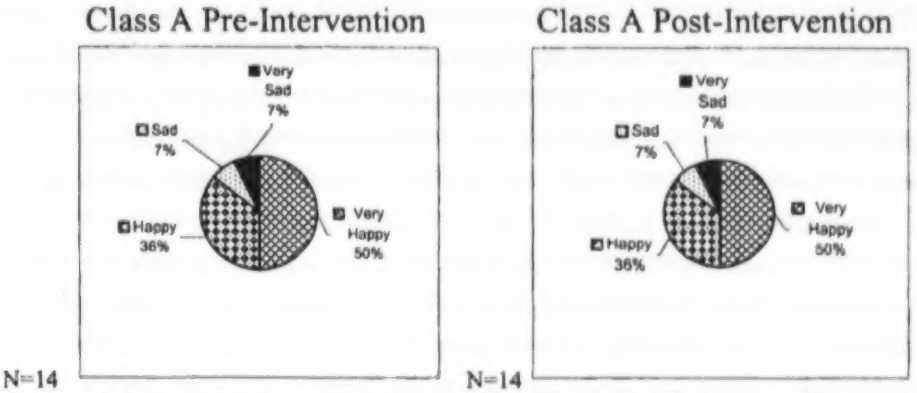
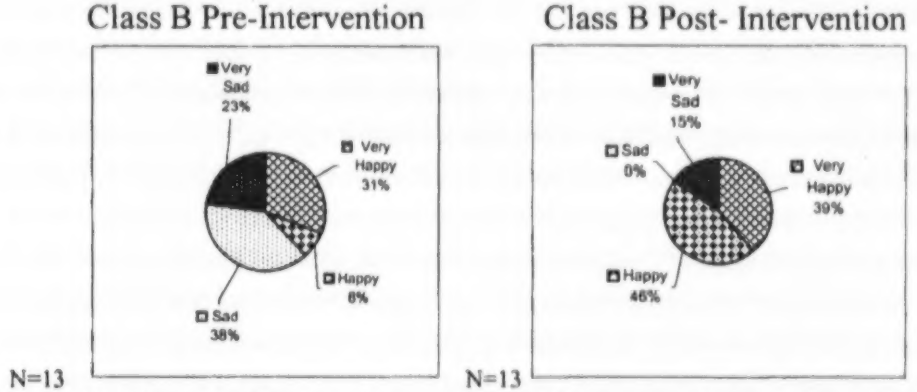
Writing Survey Question 9
How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?



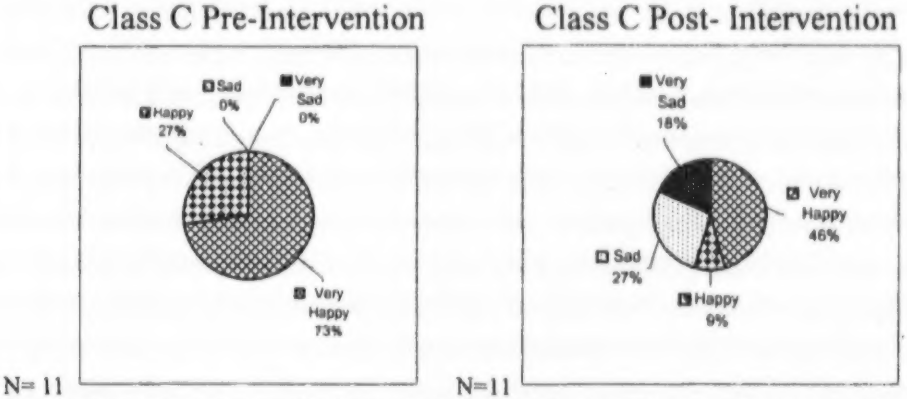
N=14 N=14

Figure 36 Classroom A saw no change from pre-intervention to post-intervention.



N=13 N=13

Figure 37 Classroom B saw an increase of 85% happy post-intervention compared to only 39% before the intervention.



N= 11 N=11

Figure 38 Classroom C showed a decrease of 45% of students wanting to write in a journal.

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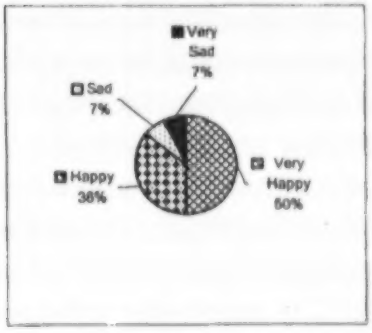
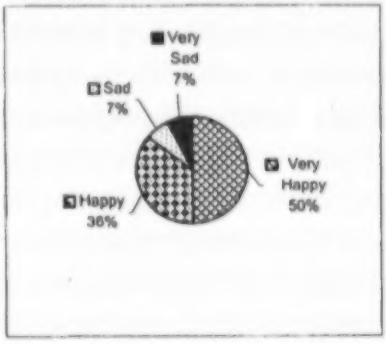
Writing Survey Question 10
How would you feel keeping a journal for class?

Class A Pre-Intervention



N=14

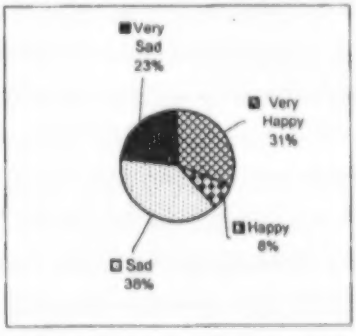
Class A Post-Intervention



N=14

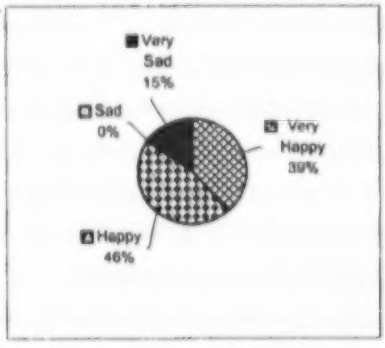
Figure 39 Classroom A saw no change from pre-intervention to post-intervention.

Class B Pre-Intervention



N=13

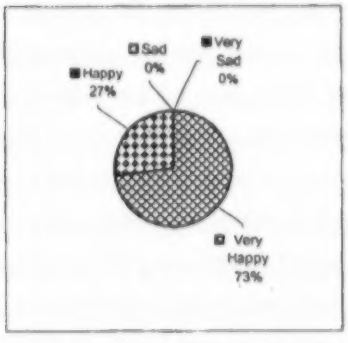
Class B Post- Intervention



N=13

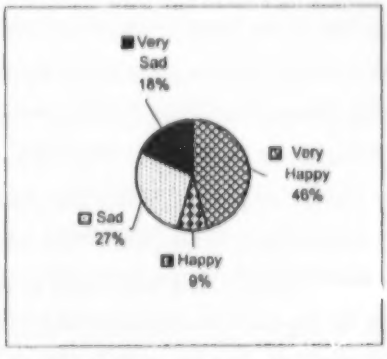
Figure 40 Classroom B saw an increase of 85% happy post-intervention compared to only 39% before the intervention.

Class C Pre-Intervention



N= 11

Class C Post- Intervention



N=11

Figure 41 Classroom C showed a decrease of 45% of students wanting to write in a journal.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

As previously stated students in the targeted elementary school exhibited difficulty writing at the first and second grade level. Through the intervention, students showed a steady increase in their writing skills as well as their interest in their own writing. Through the use of rubrics, checklists, and conferences students improved their ability to move from standard to conventional spelling, handwriting skills, completion of sentences, and scores on standardized tests. The teachers also felt that their instruction was more worthwhile and showed more student growth than their previous experiences with writing instruction. Overall, the students seemed more confident and motivated to write and share their writing as the intervention progressed.

The teacher researchers feel that this intervention was successful in their classrooms. Some modifications were made with the conferencing schedules and the format of the mini-lessons. However, these were made to adjust to teacher and student needs. One problem that the teacher researchers encountered was the time constraints during the school day. Due to scheduling of specials and other activities, there was a lack of time for a complete writing block. At times, conferencing had to be cut short or rescheduled due to this and student absences. Also, our district has a high mobility rate, which disrupts classrooms with students leaving and coming into the classroom. When a new student arrives, they have to be acclimated into the classroom routine. This at times also cut into the writing time. If other teachers were to implement this intervention in their classroom the teacher researchers recommend that they also adapt areas to fit their teaching style and student needs. For struggling students, it was found that a word wall

helped the students create new words as well as use those that were available for them. This allows for the teacher to spend less time spelling words for students and more time to guide their writing techniques. Classroom layout should allow for the students to conference with one another as well as be able to see the board and word wall. Teachers should be aware that this is a growing process. While they may not see progress right away they will see a long-term effect as the lessons proceed. As long as the basic concepts of guided mini-lessons, independent writing time, conferencing, and creation of portfolios are somehow demonstrated, progression should be seen in their classroom. Researchers should be cautious and aware of the targeted group as well as anticipated time allotment for the intended population. Also, they should adjust the assessment tools to accommodate the strengths and weaknesses of the students. All in all, the three teacher researchers feel that this intervention proved that writing could be a learning experience for all involved.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Parent Letter and Consent Form

Saint Xavier University
Institutional Review Board

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving the Writing Process

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires me to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects my instruction. I have chosen to examine how to improve the writing process.

The purpose of this project is to improve writing skills in the primary grades. It will help your student develop and enhance pre-writing and writing skills.

I will be conducting my project from September 2001 to December 2001. The activities related to the project will take place during regular instructional delivery. The gathering of information for my project during these activities offers no risks of any kind to your child.

Your permission allows me to include your student in the reporting of information for my project. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential, and information included in the project report will be grouped so that no individual can be identified. The report will be used to share what I have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate, information gathered about your student will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or would like further information about my project, please contact me at Hiawatha School (708)795-2327.

If you agree to have your student participate in the project, please sign the attached statement and return it to me. I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the statement if you wish.

Sincerely,

Lori Garcia, Jodi Meyer, and Leah Walsh

PLEASE RETURN THE ATTACHED STATEMENT TO ME BY SEPTEMBER 10th.

Appendix A
Parent Letter and Consent Form

Saint Xavier University
Institutional Review Board

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving the Writing Process

I, _____, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to my child's participation in this project. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

NAME OF MINOR:_____

_____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian Date

Appendix B
Writing Rubric

Name: Date:

	1	2	3	4
Handwriting	Lines on paper are not followed and most letter shapes need improvement (or don't resemble letters).	The letters are beginning to fit onto the lines and most resemble the letters intended.	The handwriting is legible and all letters are clearly identified, but a few need improvement.	All letters are formed correctly on the lines.
Capitalization	The writer only uses capitals (or lowercase) in writing.	The writer intermixes capitals and lowercase incorrectly in their writing. (ex.- liKe) Capitals begin most sentences.	Capitals are put at the beginning of each sentence, but other capitals are used incorrectly (ex- proper names or I).	Capitals and lowercase letters are used appropriately throughout. All I's or proper nouns are capitalized.
Punctuation	There is no punctuation present, or only one period at the end of the entire piece of writing.	There is punctuation, but some of it is incorrect. Most sentences end with a period.	Periods are used correctly, but commas, apostrophes and question marks are not.	All punctuation is used correctly on a regular basis. A minor mistake may be present.
Sentence Structure	The sentences are very simple and are usually copied from a prompt structure.	The sentences tend to be very short and repetitive. Some run-ons or fragments may be seen.	The sentences are longer than 5 words and sound somewhat different than one another. Run-ons or fragments are somewhat complex.	The sentences are beginning to become longer and include lists or contain more complex language.
Spelling	No or few words are spelled correctly. Some words may consist of just the initial sound or may be missing vowels.	Some sight words are spelled correctly, and invented spelling is hard to understand at times. Most of the writing may consist of sight words.	Sight words are mostly correct and invented spelling is easily understood. Invented spelling is not used for sight words.	Spelling is fairly consistent with conventional spelling. The invented words are for complex vocabulary.
Quantity (Mark irregardless of punctuation)	There is one complete sentence written.	There are 2-3 complete sentences written.	There are 4 or more complete sentences written.	The sentences form a complete paragraph about one topic.
Totals:				

Total points= /24

Appendix C
First Grade Writing Checklist

Writer's Checklist- 1st Grade

	Yes	sometimes ⇩	No
Did the writer correctly identify letters when asked?	☐		☐
Did the writer correctly identify letter sounds when asked?	☐		☐
Did the writer attempt to use invented spelling?	☐		☐
Can the writer copy a sentence correctly?	☐		☐
Did the writer form letters correctly?	☐		☐
Did the writer use correct spacing on lined paper?	☐		☐
Are word wall words spelled correctly in the work?	☐		☐
Can the child read aloud his/ her writing?	☐		☐

Comments:

Appendix D
Second Grade Writing Checklist

Writer's Checklist- 2nd Grade

	Yes	sometimes ⇩	No
Did the writer correctly identify letters when asked?	☐		☐
Did the writer correctly identify letter sounds when asked?	☐		☐
Are letters formed correctly on lined paper?	☐		☐
Does the writer use correct spacing on lined paper?	☐		☐
Does the writer use lowercase and uppercase letters correctly?	☐		☐
Did the writer use invented spelling?	☐		☐
Is the writer moving from invented to conventional spelling?	☐		☐
Are there capitals at the beginning of each sentence?	☐		☐
Are there periods at the end of complete sentences?	☐		☐
Are word wall words spelled correctly in the work?	☐		☐
Can the child read aloud his/ her writing?	☐		☐

Appendix E
Writing Interest Survey

Name: _____

Writing Interest Survey

Directions: After the teacher has read the question aloud, please circle the words that show your feelings and interests about writing. Circle **only one** choice for each question.

1. How would you feel if you wrote about something you have heard or seen?

Very happy Happy Upset Very Upset

2. How would you feel writing a letter to a store asking about something you might buy there?

Very happy Happy Upset Very Upset

3. How would you feel if your teacher asked you to go back and change some of your writing?

Very happy Happy Upset Very Upset

4. How would you feel writing poetry for fun?

Very happy Happy Upset Very Upset

5. How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?

Very happy Happy Upset Very Upset

Appendix E
Writing Interest Survey

6. How would you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?			
Very happy	Happy	Upset	Very Upset
7. How would you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?			
Very happy	Happy	Upset	Very Upset
8. How would you feel about writing a story instead of watching TV?			
Very happy	Happy	Upset	Very Upset
9. How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?			
Very happy	Happy	Upset	Very Upset
10. How would you feel keeping a journal for class?			
Very happy	Happy	Upset	Very Upset

Appendix F
Six Week Assessment

6 Week Assessment

Student:
Class writing goal:

Writing Performance:
G=Good Effort
N=Need to Work Harder on This

1. Quantity of writing in portfolio	G	N
2. Quality of writing in portfolio	G	N
3. On-task behavior during writing	G	N
4. Class writing goal accomplished	G	N
5. Personal goal accomplished (if applicable)	G	N

Comments about this six week's writing:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Suggested goal for student:

_____

_____

Appendix G
Teacher Generated Writing Prompts

Possible Journal Prompts

I like to play _____.

I like to eat _____.

My favorite TV show is _____.

My favorite game is _____.

My favorite color is _____.

My favorite animal is _____.

My favorite _____ is _____.

I don't like _____.

On my birthday, I like to _____.

My favorite subject is _____.

The best part of school is _____.

I'm afraid of _____.

I'm not afraid of _____.

I want to _____ after school.

I'd like to go to _____.

If I had a million dollars, I would _____.

When I grow up, I want to _____.

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